

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1        1. A method for providing a forum for user interaction, comprising:  
2            creating one or more clones of the forum wherein each clone is an instance of the  
3 forum, thereby allowing any number of users to be in the same forum while limiting the  
4 number of users in each instance of the forum;  
5            determining whether a relationship exists between a user entering the forum and one  
6 or more other users entering the forum or one or more other users already in the forum; and  
7            if a relationship exists, placing the user entering the forum in a clone of the forum  
8 based on the relationship.

1        2. The method of claim 1, further comprising:  
2            receiving information from the user entering the forum indicating one or more forums  
3 the user has been in;  
4            receiving information from one or more other users indicating one or more forums  
5 each of the other users has been in; and  
6            determining that a relationship exists between the user entering the forum and another  
7 user if the user and the other user both have been in the same second forum, the second  
8 forum being different from the forum the user is entering.

1        3. The method of claim 1, further comprising:  
2            receiving information from the user entering the forum indicating what clones of what  
3 forums the user has been in;  
4            receiving information from one or more other users indicating what clones of what  
5 forums each of the other users has been in; and  
6            determining that a relationship exists between the user entering the forum and another  
7 user if the user and the other user both have been in the same clone of a forum.

1        4. The method of claim 1 further comprising:  
2            receiving information from the user entering the forum indicating the domain name of  
3 the user's address;  
4            receiving information from one or more other users indicating the domain names of

the addresses of each of the other users; and

determining that a relationship exists between the user entering the forum and another user if the user entering the forum and the other user both have the same domain name.

5. The method of claim 1, further comprising:

receiving information from the user entering the forum indicating a country associated with the user's address;

receiving information from one or more other users indicating a country associated with each of the other user's addresses; and

determining that a relationship exists between the user entering the forum and another user if the user entering the forum and the other user both have addresses associated with the same country.

6. The method of claim 1, further comprising:

receiving information from the user entering the forum indicating a language in which the user prefers to communicate;

receiving information from one or more other users indicating a language in which each of the other users prefers to communicate; and

determining that a relationship exists between the user entering the forum and another user if the user entering the forum and the other user prefer to communicate in the same language.

7. The method of claim 1, further comprising:

receiving an indication from the user entering the forum or from one or more other users that a relationship exists between the user entering the forum and one or more other users.

8. The method of claim 7 wherein placing the user in a clone includes placing the user in a clone other than a clone containing a designated user with whom a relationship exists.

9. The method of claim 1 wherein placing the user in a clone includes placing the user in a clone with another user with whom a relationship exists.

09788525-022101

1 10. The method of claim 1 wherein placing the user in a clone includes placing the user in  
2 the clone with another user with whom a relationship exists and who most recently entered  
3 the forum.

1 11. The method of claim 1, further comprising limiting the number of users in each  
2 instance of the forum to a maximum number.

1 12. The method of claim 1, further comprising:  
2 limiting the number of users in each instance of the forum to a threshold number,  
3 except if a relationship exists between the user entering the forum and one or more other  
4 users; and  
5 placing the user entering the forum in a clone with more than the threshold number of  
6 users only if a relationship exists between the user and one or more of the other users in the  
7 clone or entering the clone.

1 13. The method of claim 12, further comprising:  
2 receiving information from the user entering the forum indicating what clones of what  
3 forums the user has been in;  
4 receiving information from one or more other users indicating what clones of what  
5 forums each of the other users has been in; and  
6 determining that a relationship exists between the user entering the forum and another  
7 user if the user and the other user both have been in the same clone of a forum.

1 14. The method of claim 1 wherein the forum comprises an interactive forum maintained  
2 by a system of one or more computers in which users interact by submitting messages and  
3 reading messages from other users as they are submitted.

1 15. The method of claim 1 wherein the forum comprises an interactive virtual world  
2 maintained by a system of one or more computers where users interact by moving avatars,  
3 each user having one or more avatars in the virtual world, and observing the movement of the  
4 avatars in the virtual world.

09788526-022101

1 16. A computer system for providing a forum for user interaction comprising:

2 means for sending and receiving content to and from a network;

3 means coupled to means for sending and receiving content for creating one or more  
4 clones of the forum wherein each clone is an instance of the forum, thereby allowing any  
5 number of users to be in the same forum while limiting the number of users in each instance  
6 of the forum;

7 means coupled to means for sending and receiving content for determining whether a  
8 relationship exists between a user entering the forum and one or more other users entering  
9 the forum or one or more other users already in the forum and, if a relationship exists,  
10 placing the user entering the forum in a clone of the forum based on the relationship.

1 17. The computer system of claim 16, further comprising:

2 means for receiving information from the user entering the forum indicating one or  
3 more forums the user has been in;

4 means for receiving information from one or more other users indicating one or more  
5 forums each of the other users has been in; and

6 means for determining that a relationship exists between the user entering the forum  
7 and another user if the user and the other user both have been in the same second forum, the  
8 second forum being different from the forum the user is entering.

1 18. The computer system of claim 16, further comprising

2 means for receiving information from the user entering the forum indicating what  
3 clones of what forums the user has been in;

4 means for receiving information from one or more other users indicating what clones  
5 of what forums each of the other users has been in; and

6 means for determining that a relationship exists between the user entering the forum  
7 and another user if the user and the other user both have been in the same clone of a second  
8 forum, the second forum being different from the forum the user is entering.

1 19. The computer system of claim 16 further comprising:

2 means for receiving information from the user entering the forum indicating the

domain name of the user's address;

means for receiving information from one or more other users indicating the domain names of the addresses of each of the other users; and

means for determining that a relationship exists between the user entering the forum and another user if the user entering the forum and the other user both have the same domain name.

20. The computer system of claim 16, further comprising:

means for receiving information from the user entering the forum indicating a country associated with the user's address;

means for receiving information from one or more other users indicating a country associated with each of the other user's addresses; and

means for determining that a relationship exists between the user entering the forum and another user if the user entering the forum and the other user both have addresses associated with the same country.

21. The computer system of claim 16, further comprising:

means for receiving information from the user entering the forum indicating a language in which the user prefers to communicate;

means for receiving information from one or more other users indicating a language in which each of the other users prefers to communicate; and

means for determining that a relationship exists between the user entering the forum and another user if the user entering the forum and the other user prefer to communicate in the same language.

22. The system of claim 16, further comprising means for receiving an indication from the user entering the forum or from one or more other users that a relationship exists between the user entering the forum and one or more other users.

1 23. The system of claim 22 wherein placing the user in a clone includes placing the user  
2 in a clone other than a clone containing a designated user with whom a relationship exists.

1 24. The system of claim 16 wherein placing the user in a clone includes placing the user  
2 in a clone with another user with whom a relationship exists.

1 25. The system of claim 16 wherein placing the user in a clone includes placing the user  
2 in the clone with another user with whom a relationship exists and who most recently entered  
3 the forum.

1 26. The system of claim 16, further comprising means for limiting the number of users in  
2 each instance of the forum to a maximum number.

1 27. The system of claim 16, further comprising:

2 means for limiting the number of users in each instance of the forum to a threshold  
3 number, except if a relationship exists between the user entering the forum and one or more  
4 other users; and

5 means for placing the user entering the forum in a clone with more than the threshold  
6 number of users only if a relationship exists between the user and one or more of the other  
7 users in the clone or entering the clone.

1 28. The system of claim 27, further comprising:

2 means for receiving information from the user entering the forum indicating what  
3 clones of what forums the user has been in;

4 means for receiving information from one or more other users indicating what clones  
5 of what forums each of the other users has been in; and

6 means for determining that a relationship exists between the user entering the forum  
7 and another user if the user and the other user both have been in the same clone of a forum.

1 29. The system of claim 16 wherein the forum comprises an interactive forum maintained  
2 by a system of one or more computers in which users interact by submitting messages and  
3 reading messages from other users as they are submitted.

1 30. The system of claim 16 wherein the forum comprises an interactive virtual world  
2 maintained by a system of one or more computers where users interact by moving avatars,  
3 each user having one or more avatars in the virtual world, and observing the movement of the  
4 avatars in the virtual world.

09788526-022101